

ROCKSCAPES



Pony Express rockscape, St. Joseph

It's not a word you'll find in the dictionary, but it is a way MoDOT celebrates Missouri's past while beautifying the state's roadsides. Here's a look at four of these stony monuments and the stories behind their creation.

MARK TWAIN ROCKS

By Marisa Brown

Hannibal, Mo., has a new welcome mat that really rocks ... to the tune of 90 tons! Hannibal's most famous resident, Mark Twain, now welcomes motorists as they cross the Mark Twain Memorial Bridge from Illinois into Missouri. As motorists drive over the Mighty Mississippi, on the south side of Route 36 they will see the likeness of noted writer Mark Twain depicted in Missouri's newest rockscape – one of only four in the state.

"A rockscape is a picture made out of rocks," explains Roadside Supervisor Rich Dunker, who managed the Twain rockscape project.



Land for the rockscape is prepared and a metal outline is placed.



Five different kinds of rocks were used to fill in the details and add color.

Missouri's three others are a silhouette of a Pony Express rider on Interstate 29 in St. Joseph, a Kansas City arrowhead on I-29 entering the downtown area and an outline of the State of Missouri on the same interstate.

Steep Slope

The 60-foot wide by 90-foot high Mark Twain rockscape was primarily paid for with federal enhancement funds that MoDOT cannot use for highway and bridge maintenance. It was placed on a steep slope so it would be easy to see – but as a result, it was not easy to build.

“With the completion of a new Mark Twain Memorial Bridge in 2000, a lot of landscaping was done around this area on the Missouri side,” Dunker says. “This rocky slope did not lend itself to any beautification and with it being so steep, it seemed natural to place a rockscape there for people to enjoy.”

Although the finished product is something the citizens of Hannibal are proud of, it was not easy coming up with an agreed-upon design of Mark Twain.

“We had people from all over the tri-state area giving us their opinion on what he should look like – young, old, with a cigar, without,” Dunker says. “The final design was really a culmination of several ideas.”

The rockscape's design was first put on paper as a watercolor by local artist and MoDOT

construction worker Deb Sassen. After modifications were made and the final design was agreed upon, Sassen and Dunker created a miniature model using metal as the outline and the actual rocks as the fill. This model was on display several places in Hannibal so residents could get an idea of what the rockscape would look like when it was completed.

Metal and More

The rockscape outline is formed by more than 1,000 feet of metal. Five types of rock are used to color Twain's distinct features: white limestone for the hair and mustache, black trap for the background, white marble chips for the coat and lettering, a man-made gold lava for the face and black obsidian for the bow tie.

Almost exactly two years after the new Mark Twain Memorial Bridge was opened and about four months from the first metal bending to the final rock laying, the Mark Twain rockscape was completed on Sept. 19, 2002.

Besides its eye-catching uniqueness, the Mark Twain rockscape offers a distinct advantage: it requires very little maintenance.

“We'll occasionally have to move some of the rocks around,” Dunker says. “But for the most part, we don't need to do much to it.”

Marisa Brown is the Public Information and Outreach manager for MoDOT's Northeast District.

ST. JOSEPH'S STONE PONY

By Elaine Justus

For 18 months starting in 1860, the Pony Express carried mail 2,000 miles between St. Joseph, Mo., and Sacramento, Calif. The transcontinental telegraph line put it out of business, but the brave rider and his fast horse will gallop forever in St. Joseph's rockscape.

The project began in 1995 as a simple design idea by retired MoDOT Utilities Engineer Gary Morris, who was impressed with the arrowhead rockscape in Kansas City. Two MoDOT interns developed the first sketches, based upon the original 4-cent postage stamp design.

The project was a cooperative effort between MoDOT and the community. Materials were purchased through contributions from the Buchanan County Commission, the St. Joseph Convention & Visitors Bureau and the City of St. Joseph. The Southside Fall Festival Committee and Southside Progressive Association also pledged their support. MoDOT agreed to build and maintain the silhouette.

Work-release inmates from the Western Reception and Diagnostic Center in St. Joseph supplied the labor, while retired Roadside Supervisor Gilbert Garrett and Senior Crew Worker Gary Gibson directed the project.



In a few months, the final rock is placed and the rockscape is completed.

It's located north of Riverside Park on the west side of Interstate 229. The 80-foot wide by 60-foot high rockscape was outlined in metal, then filled in with more than 48 tons of rock, including Colorado black obsidian for the rider, Wisconsin brown glacier median for the horse (including its 18-foot long tail), Missouri Ozark sponge tuff for the saddle and Georgia white marble chips surrounding the horse and rider.

The "Pony Express Silhouette," as townspeople call the rockscape, was formally dedicated on November 20, 1998. At the ceremony, former St. Joseph Mayor Larry Stobbs said, "This project is a true piece of art along our highways."

Elaine Justus is the Public Information and Outreach manager for MoDOT's Northwest District.



The Kansas City Arrowhead and Missouri State Outline



Missouri State Outline

In October 1999, Sgt. Robert J. Kimberling of Troop H Highway Patrol was shot and killed by a mentally ill driver along I-29 near St. Joseph. About a year later, MoDOT and the Missouri State Highway Patrol worked together to build a memorial that would honor his life and service to the people of Missouri.

By July 2000, a permanent memorial was designed and built in the clear zone of the Exit 50 off ramp. The monument is an outline of Missouri filled with white marble and black obsidian. At the center of the outline is a large boulder with a plaque memorializing Kimberling. The materials and construction of the rock sculpture were paid for through the Outdoor Advertising Tree Fund, and no taxpayer dollars were used.

The Kansas City Arrowhead

In 1990, the roadside staff at MoDOT's Kansas City office decided to add some visual interest to the city scene. Maintenance Superintendent Bill Billings suggested an arrowhead pointing to downtown.

With more resourcefulness than resources, the crew hauled in rock from a construction zone, planted inexpensive mums and found free mulch. Incarcerated personnel provided labor.

Over the years, the rockscape, located just south of the Independence Avenue bridge on Interstate 70, has come to resemble the Kansas City Chiefs football team logo, with white rock letters and a red background created by crimson pigmy barberry bushes. The very visible, 60-foot by 90-foot rockscape continues to provide a lot of pleasure for a little investment.